



## Testimony Opposing HB 7207 - An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2019, and Making Appropriations Therefore

Daniel Long, PhD.  
Appropriations Committee  
February 21, 2017

Good Evening Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Senator Osten, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am the Research Director at Connecticut Voices for Children. Connecticut Voices for Children is a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families. **We are submitting this testimony in opposition to the Governor's proposed budget for the State Department of Education.**

Thank you for taking the time listen to testimony about the importance of many essential programs. You have a tough job as you evaluate difficult tradeoffs. **Tonight I would like to discuss Tradeoffs** in the current budget and the **Principles** and **Tools** needed to help make tough decisions about tradeoffs.

**(1)What tradeoffs do we face with this current budget?** Should we be increasing funding for Special Education block grants and charter schools while we cut funds to Early Care and Education, Higher Education, vocational schools, and wrap around programs that create effective community schools.

**(2) What principles and tools should we use to make these tough decisions during a budget crisis?** I would argue that we need to follow **the principles of pursuing smart investments, concern for the most vulnerable children, and avoiding rash decisions. We also need the tools of high quality data, time, and transparency to help evaluate tradeoffs.**

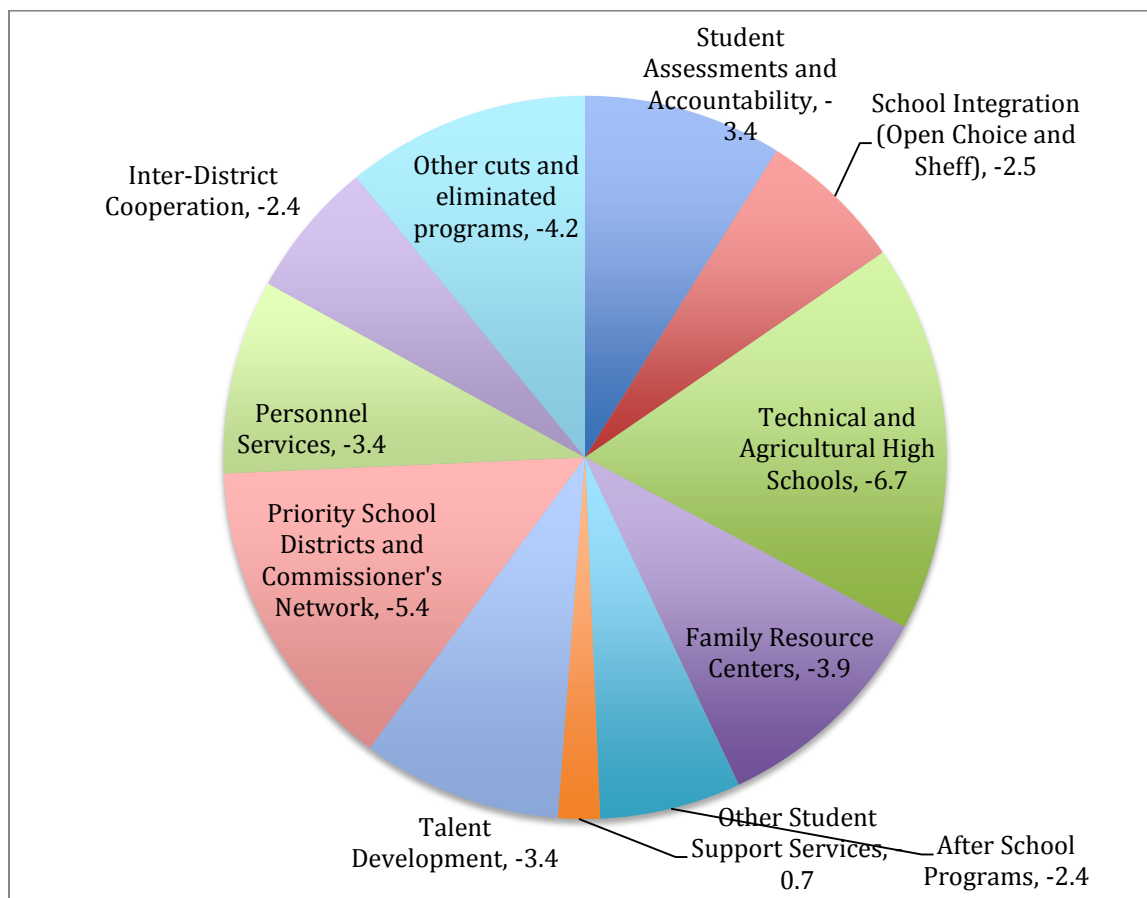
### Tradeoffs:

- The current K-12, OEC, Higher Ed. budgets as a whole make large cuts to early care and education with 7.7 million cuts to the Office of Early Childhood and 4 million cuts to Family Resource Centers in the SDE budget. There are dramatic cuts to the Connecticut State and U. Conn systems plus 2 million cut in the Governor's Scholarship program. The OEC and Family Resource Center cuts undermine the most effective investment we can make, a high quality early care and education for children birth to 5. And, Higher education cuts hurt our competitiveness of as state and put long term growth at risk.
- An elimination of the Special Education Excess Cost Grant means that students with particularly high needs might not get essential services and small districts might suffer.
- The creation of a special education fund is based on reducing the Education Cost Sharing funds by 22% and eliminating the Special Education Excess Cost Grant. This cut to the

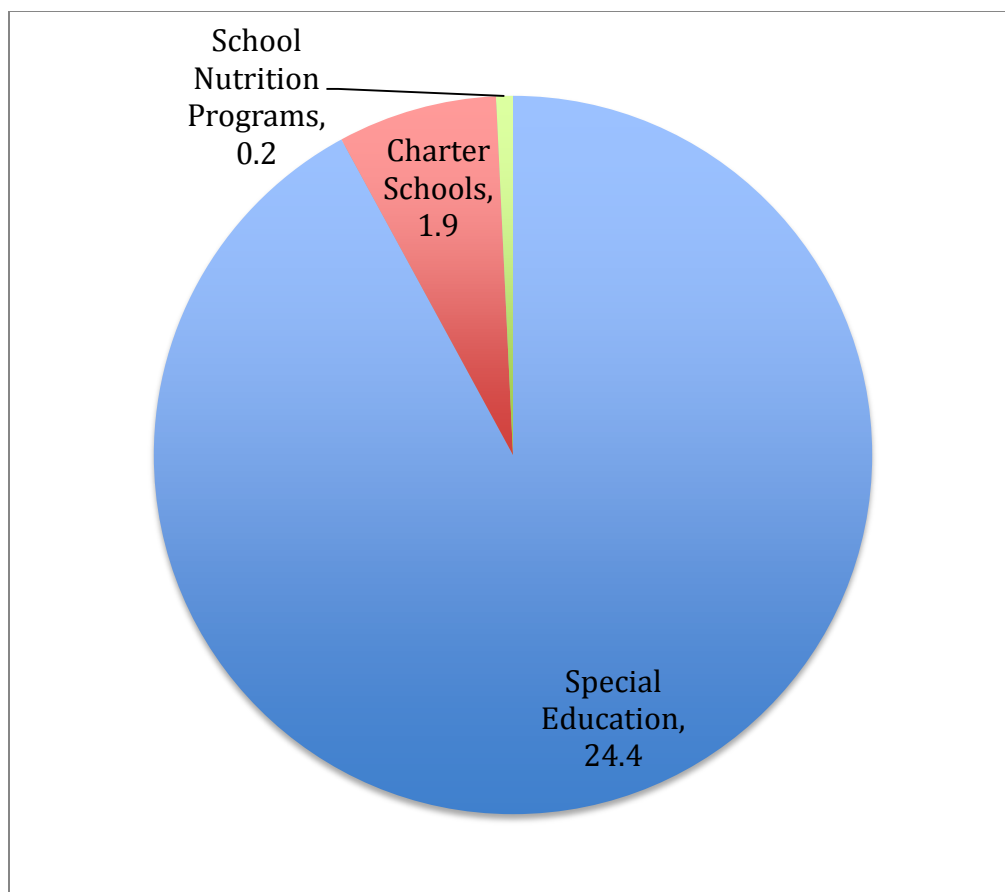
ECS line item means that 400 million will no longer be allocated based on economic need to the poorest school districts.

- In the K-12 items in the SDE budget there are 38 million in cuts offset by 26 million in increased spending. The K-12 budget increases funding for special education by 24.4 million, charter schools by about 1.9 million, and 200,000 more for nutrition programs. While 38 million are cut in almost every other line in the K-12 budget (see figure 1 below). Almost 4 million cut for family resource centers which provide essential birth to 5 investments, about a 7 million cut vocational schools, which provide needed training to create a competitive workforce , and cuts to other key investments such as wrap around services necessary for effective community schools, in addition about 2.5 million decrease in the funds for school integration, and about 3.4 million decrease in the funds to improve teacher quality.

**Figure 1: 38.5 Million in Cuts to K-12 Line Items (in Millions)**



**Figure 2: 26.5 Million increase in K-12 Line Items (in Millions)**



**Principles. We should follow the principles of focusing on smart investments, concern for the most vulnerable children, and avoiding rash decisions when we make tough decisions during a budget crisis.**

1. **Smart Investments.** Programs that provide high returns for low costs should not be cut. We should not be penny wise and pound-foolish. In the current K-12 budget cuts many programs with the highest returns such as early care and education, programs that support community schools, and vocational education have the deepest cuts. Early care and education from ages 0 to 5 provided by Family Resource Centers. (Dr. Heckman, a Nobel prize-winning economist estimated that investments in early care and education are one of the best investments to lower state budget deficits in the long term.) But, Family Resource centers were cut by 4 million, 50%. Community schools and wrap around services have been shown to be effective as we can see from the success of the Harlem Children's Zone, Promise Neighborhoods nationwide, and the New Haven's Youth Stat program. Vocational programs have been shown to improve employment, wages, and the probability of receiving an advanced degree. These important vocational programs were cut by 7 million.

## **2. Concern for the Most Vulnerable Children**

An ECS formula should be based on the principle that some students require more funds to achieve an adequate education. This means that we should have a formula that has an additional weight for students in poverty, English language learners, and special education. This formula should be adequately funded based on a costing out study to determine the true costs of an adequate education for all students in Connecticut. We do not have sufficient funds to fully fund the ECS now and we

should not try partial solutions that pit one group of needy students against another.

We should not cut the funds for the highest need special education students in the Excess Cost Grant

We need to ensure that key wrap around services to support students in the poorest communities

We need to ensure high quality care and education for children birth to five. These are among the most vulnerable children in our state. Also, funding programs like Family Resource Centers and Care 4 Kids both support some the neediest families and are smart investments.

**3. Avoid Rash decisions.** We should not change the education cost sharing formula or quickly create a new mechanism for funding special education during a budget crisis. Almost every state that has passed a successful reform to their ECS did so with increased revenue where no town lost revenue and the neediest towns received the support they needed.

**We need the tools of quality data, time, and transparency to help evaluate hard tradeoffs.**

**Data.** We need high quality data before we make dramatic changes to the ECS formula. We need a costing out or adequacy study that will tell us how much a quality education will cost. We also need indicators of poverty that are accurate. Public health insurance enrollment (Husky A) enrollment is not an accurate estimate of the number of students in poverty. We examined the American Community Survey from 2011-2015 and found that among children in poverty in Connecticut 78% are on public health insurance, 17%, are only on private insurance and 5% of children have no health insurance. Therefore 22% of students in poverty would not be counted by using Husky A as a proxy for poverty. We should use higher quality census data instead of Husky A enrollments.

**Time.** If we are making dramatic changes in the Education Cost Sharing formula, we need time to make these decisions. We need time to identify the true cost of an adequate education, gather appropriate data, hear from school boards, superintendents, parents, and consult with national education funding experts. In Connecticut we have made too many hasty education reform decisions too quickly without adequate study.

**Transparency.** We need to ensure that budgeting by the legislator is based on a clear understanding of how funds are used. The current education budget decreases transparency. Many programs are collapsed into larger opaque line items that are difficult to monitor. For example, the creation of a student services line item will hide cuts in key services to Family Resource Centers, After School programs, and other key wrap around services.

In sum, the governor's budget needs to change in order to better fund smart investments in birth to 5 (like Family Resource Centers), vocational education, and essential wrap around services for community schools. We need to preserve the special education excess cost grant. In addition we need better data through a costing out study and the use of census data instead of Husky A to measure poverty. We need more time to make important decisions about ECS. And we need more transparency not less.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to the Governor's proposed K-12 budget. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or need additional information. I can be reached at [dlong@ctvoices.org](mailto:dlong@ctvoices.org) or (203) 498-4240 (x 104)